

Contents

CHAPTER	FACTS	PAGE
INTRODUCTION		
1.	PROLOGUE: HOW THE ORIGINAL INDIAN RAMAYANA CAME TO BE WRITTEN	1
2.	VALMIKI'S RAMAYANA	10
3.	EMERGENCE OF MYANMAR RAMAYANA	45
4.	MYANMAR RAMAYANA	63
5.	THAI STYLE SONGS	75
6.	PERFORMANCE OF MYANMAR RAMAYANA DRAMA	86
7.	INFLUENCE OF RAMAYANA ON ARTS AND CRAFTS	105
8.	NAMES OF CHARACTERS AND PLACES IN INDIAN, THAI AND MYANMAR RAMAYANAS	113
9.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	117

INTRODUCTION

Scholars believe that the three kings – Ikshbaku, Dasaratha and Rama – really existed in the past. The names of the kings are mentioned in the Rig Veda. Probably, the troubles of Ayodhya which led to the exile of Rama actually took place about three thousand years ago.

The great poem known as Ramayana was composed by a poet-*rishi* (Sage) named Valmiki although the place where he lived was unknown.

The poem was probably written down in Sanskrit about two thousand and five hundred years ago. At that time the poem called Valmiki Ramayana probably consisted of five chapters (Kandas). The two other 'kandas' were added about four hundred years later.

The story of Rama was so much loved by the people that many others besides Valmiki have written Ramayanas.

The Adhyatma Ramayana is said to have been written by Vyasa, the poet of the Mahabharata. But there are also famous Ramayanas in other languages of India such as Kamba Ramayana in Tamil, Bengali Ramayana written by Krittivasi and Tulsi Ramayana in Hindi. These various Ramayanas are not all alike; each poet tells the story in his own way and each adds something which the others leave out.

It is the same with other countries of South-East Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Sometimes, although in broad outline they are almost the same as Valmiki's Ramayana, though they differ from it in detail and are more enriched at times necessarily on are sometimes spoilt unnecessarily by new characters or dramatic situations or incidents.

Historical factors leading to the existence and spread of the story of Rama (during the Bagan era (11th to 13th centuries) are, firstly, the presence in Bagan, as in other South-East Asian countries, of the Brahmanical community from South and East India and, secondly, the presence of the Mons from Thaton who might have inherited the culture, arts and folklore from the Mon Kingdoms of Haripunjay and Dvarati, the regions of which formed part of the Khmer Empire in ancient Thailand.

Beginning from the Bagan era, the story of Rama might have been orally passed from generation to generation. For instance, the literary evidence of the Ramayana can be found in the Innwa era (14th to 16th centuries) such as in the *pyo*-poem called Thuwanashan Thuhtekhan (from Suvannasama Great Jataka) Pyo composed by the poet-monk Shin Agga Thamadi. He warned all the monks to avoid telling the story of Sita and Hanuman (Rama Story) in preaching the people as the legend was not Buddhist in origin. The dramatic presentation of the Ramayana was borrowed from Thailand and together with the Rama play, many Thai style songs were composed by various composers for the play and in other themes.

In 1849, the popularity of the Ramayana in Myanmar soared to great heights when the story of Rama was depicted in continuous series of 347 stone relief sculptures ornamenting the Loka Mera - zein Pagoda of Budalin Township of Sagaing Region, Upper Myanmar.

Many and varied are the influence of the Ramayana on the numerous arts and crafts such as painting, sculpture, music, drama, lacquerware, silverware, wood carving, stone carving and masonry.